The Phantom Tollbooth Book Review

The *Phantom Tollbooth* is a fantasy book about a child named Milo who always rushes through life. Whenever Milo is in one place, he wants to be in another even if he just arrived. This book starts off with Milo walking home from school. He never looks around at his surroundings because he always wants to get to the place he is going as fast as he can. As soon as he gets home, he always goes up into his room and stares at all his toys he hasn’t played with and all of the books he has not read. I can relate to being bored, but Milo is bored out of his mind. One of the defining moments in this book is when Milo discovers a large box with a note on it which says: “For Milo, the person with all of the time in the world.” I thought that this was pretty cool because it made me question how the person who left the box would know that.

At this point in the book, Milo thinks that this was a present from a person he knows. Milo was curious enough to open the box right away. Not sure I would have dared. At first, I had no idea what was in the box. Then I remembered the book is called *The Phantom Tollbooth.* Milo discovers several pieces and instructions to make a full scale tollbooth. After Milo assembles the Tollbooth, finds the map and reads it, he decides that he wants to go to a place called Dictionopolis. Milo then entered the Tollbooth and appeared in a place that was not familiar to him.

One of the oddest parts in the book was when he meets the “whether” man. I can always relate to meeting somebody who is a little odd, but the “whether” man is more than a little odd. In fact, I found myself questioning the sanity of the man, just like Milo did. The man was talking about very odd things, though he eventually got to the point which is Milo is in a place called The Land of Expectations. I thought that the author was very imaginative in the place names and the descriptions because it was very original.

You can always see the fantasy part of this book, but one of the clearest examples of fantasy and imagination I have ever seen was at the very start of the book. That example was the description of why Milo was in Expectations, which was: “Expectations is the place you must end up before you go anywhere.” I think this refers to your expectations of the place you are going. You do not see very many “Kids” chapter books that make you sit back and think.

Another one of my favourite parts was when Milo ends up in a place call Dolldrums. It was odd because all of the Lethargarians that live in Dolldrums do nothing whatsoever because that is the only thing they are allowed to do. For example, they are not allowed to smile, giggle, laugh or even think. I liked this part because it is when Milo meets the “watchdog” named Tock (Tock is a very large dog who has the head, tail and legs of a dog, but has the body of a clock). At first, Tock comes running at Milo with his teeth bared and his face scrunched up. I know how startled and frightened Milo would have been because I also have been chased by a dog that had its face in the same position.

Another part I liked was when Milo and Tock drive to and enter a kingdom called Dictionopolis because it was quite odd, just like most of the book. I liked the incident in the Word Market when the Humbug (a character who is a tall bug who gets almost everything wrong) knocks down pretty much every stand and blames it on Milo and Tock. Milo then meets officer Shrift who sentences Milo and Tock to 6 million years in jail. I have been sentenced to my room for what seemed an eternity but actually being sentenced to 6 million years is a bit overboard. The one thing I liked most about this part is when Officer Shrift is writing in his notepad about Milo forgetting Shrifts birthday, even though Milo had never met him before.

As you can imagine, the dungeon that Milo and Tock were put in was not pleasant whatsoever. My other favourite part from this predicament that Milo and Tock where in was when they meet the “Which”. Milo and Tock were nervous because Officer Shrift had said that a witch was in the dungeon they were sent to. When Milo and Tock met the witch, she explained that she was the “which” and not the witch. I was very entertained by the “which” because her title was given to her because long ago, she chose what words people would use. She was thrown in the dungeon because she got greedy and kept the words to herself until people simply could not talk. She also told them of a king who had ruled all of the land that Dictionopolis and a place called Digitopolis now reside on. The king had regretted not having any daughters, but then found two baby girls. He named the twins Rhyme and Reason. After the king had died, his two sons split apart from one another and decided they would create their own kingdoms. Rhyme and Reason were banished by the two brothers (King Azaz and The Mathemagician) because they were jealous of the ability of Rhyme and Reason to settle any argument fairly. This information was very useful in setting the stage for the events that followed.

During the Royal Banquet, Milo was required to say what they were to have for the banquet which the king took all too literally when Milo recommended they have a square meal. Milo then had to give a speech, from which he practically ate his own words. At the end of the banquet, Milo, Tock and the Humbug talked to King Azaz about Rhyme and Reason being banished (which had made the entire kingdom very unfair when it came to arguments) and tried to convince him to bring back Rhyme and Reason. One of the key parts of the book was when King Azaz sent Milo, Tock and the Humbug to rescue Rhyme and Reason. King Azaz then gave Milo a box full of all the words that he knows which would prove very useful.

An additional part I liked was when Milo and company meet Alec Bings. I found Alec interesting because rather than growing up from the ground; Alec floats in the air and grows down. Alec shows Milo a group of people large enough to inhabit a town walking through a forest. Alec explains that there was a town here many years ago. People stopped looking around and all of the buildings slowly disappeared. No one noticed. The only way the town would be returned to normal was when Rhyme and Reason came back. I thought this part was a bit sad and gloomy, but I liked how it added to the problem of rescuing Rhyme and Reason.

One part of the book I did not particularly care for was Milo, Tock and Humbug’s encounter with a man named Dr. Dischord, The Doctor of Dissonance. Dr. Dischord is responsible for all of the unpleasant sounds ever made. Milo goes off into the Valley of Sound (where there is no sound). Milo is required to go into a castle that is owned by the Sound Keeper and bring out a sound (sound has a shape in this book). The Sound Keeper is the person who keeps all sounds that have ever been used. Milo goes into the castle (where there is sound) and attempts to get a sound without the Sound Keeper noticing. Milo cannot get a sound from the vault, but ends up saying a word and then keeping it in his mouth. He goes back to the protestors and loads the sound into a giant cannon aimed at the castle. The sound is fired at the castle reducing the structure to rubble, in turn releasing all sound. This part was a bit cruel because Milo helped destroy the Sound Keeper’s home. The reason that I did not like it was because I did not quite see the relevance to the overall storyline.

I too liked it when Milo, Tock and the Humbug get to a sign in front of three roads. The sign says the distance to Digitopolis in several different units of measurement. The mathematical part becomes obvious when Milo and company meet the Dodecahedron. The Dodecahedron helps them figure out which way is correct with a math problem. If a small car carrying three people at thirty miles per hour for ten minutes along a road five miles long at 11:35 in the morning starts at the same time as three people who have been travelling in a small automobile at 20 miles per hour for 15 minutes on another road exactly twice as long as one half the distance as the other, while a dog, a bug, and a boy travel an equal distance in the same time or the same distance in an equal time along a third road in mid-October, then which one arrives first and which is the best way to go? The answer is they are all the wrong way. Milo and company are led by the Dodecahedron to meet the Mathemagician, the ruler of Digitopolis and brother of King Azaz. Milo talks to the Mathemagician about his quest to rescue Rhyme and Reason and convinces him to agree to set them free. Milo and company manage to reach Rhyme and Reason and rescue them even though they were being pursued by many angry Demons such as the demon of habit and the demon of misdirection. They then make it back to Digitopolis and are treated like heroes. Milo then returns home with a new outlook on life and never allows himself to become bored again.

In closing, I liked *The Phantom Tollbooth* because of its creativity in the storyline. I loved its originality. At first, Milo was a person who was always bored and quite gloomy, but at the end of the book, he became much more appreciative of his surroundings. He became much more likeable as a character too. I thought that the end of the book was still out of the ordinary from your average children’s story. Rather than ending with Milo going off on another adventure, the person who had delivered the Tollbooth took it back. Milo was apparently not the only child intended to use it. This turn of events caught me by surprise. I also liked the math component of the book because I like to try and solve mathematical problems myself without reading what the answer is like the question: 4+9-2x1 6+13x6-6 7+8x2-3+2 6-13 4+37+2-5=0. Though not perfect, *The PhantomTollbooth* is still was one of my favourite books. I hope to read it again. Overall, *The Phantom Tollbooth* is a fantastic book, and I highly recommend reading it.